

Development-Induced Displacement: A Call for Ethical Considerations in Africa

Robson Mandishekwa

Abstract

Development projects often lead to displacement. This chapter builds on the trolley problem as an ethical decision-making tool for displacement. It argues that despite the trolley problem having been identified about six decades ago, its application in decisions about development projects that lead to displacement is rare, especially in Africa. That is the ethical considerations, especially using the trolley problem, about displacing people have been under-researched. The study, therefore, puts forward the argument that despite the benefits derived from development projects, ethical considerations still need to be emphasised. This research, therefore, used the trolley problem as one sacrificial dilemma model for ethical decision-making. The findings indicate that utilitarian approaches suggest that displacing the minority is acceptable based on the fact that the majority are going to benefit. Deontologically, this displacement is not morally justifiable because the government has a moral obligation to protect every citizen against arbitrary displacement. If approached for assistance, courts may not need to intervene because, from the trolley problem view, they will be perceived as allowing the killing of innocent civilians, if they rule in favour of the government or development partners. Again, the government must improve the welfare of the citizens, who include both the displaced and the non-displaced, but by instituting the project, the displaced may be worse off than before. Faced with this dilemma, the government normally uses its power of eminent domain to attain supposedly utilitarian results.

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